DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 954 TM 034 441

AUTHOR	Wightman, Linda F.
TITLE	Self-Reported Methods of Test Preparation Used by LSAT Takers: A Summary of Responses from June and September 1989 Test Takers. LSAC Research Report Series.
INSTITUTION	Law School Admission Council, Newtown, PA.
REPORT NO	LSAC-RR-90-01
PUB DATE	1990-04-00
NOTE	12p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Entrance Examinations; Higher Education; Law Schools; *Law Students; *Self Report; *Study; *Test Coaching
IDENTIFIERS	*Law School Admission Test

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes self-reported information about the kinds and extent of test preparation used by those taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). For the first time, in June 1989, test takers were asked to volunteer information about how they prepared for the LSAT. Approximately 75% of the test takers in June and September 1989 responded to the test preparation questions. Respondents represented the test taking population fairly well in terms of gender, ethnicity, and geographic breakdown, but they tended to be younger and more able than their nonresponding counterparts. Findings show that a large number of test takers failed to make use of the sample questions and explanations that are provided free of charge, and a surprisingly small number worked through the sample LSAT on their own before taking the test. Approximately 45% of test takers took a rest preparation or coaching course, and a small number reported taking the LSAT without having prepared at all. Females are more likely than males to participate in LSAT-specific preparation. Minorities are less likely to use test preparation materials or to attend a test preparation course, and older test takers were less likely to prepare at all. The largest difference in mean LSAT score was observed between those who work through one or more actual tests compared with those who do not. Moderate differences are observed for those who study the questions and explanations in the "Information Book" or use a book not published by Law Services. The smallest differences are seen for those who attend a coaching course. (SLD)

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Self-reported Methods of Test Preparation Used by LSAT Takers:

A Summary of Responses from June and September 1989 Test Takers

Linda F. Wightman

Law School Admission Council
Research Report 90-01
April 1990

TM034441

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A Publication of Law School Admission Council/Law School Admission Services

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This report summarizes self-reported information about the kinds and extent of test preparation used by LSAT takers. For the first time, in June 1989, test takers were asked to voluntarily report information about how they prepared for the LSAT. Specifically, the following questions appeared on the LSAT answer sheet:

How did you prepare for the LSAT? (Select all that apply)

- By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*.
- By studying through one or more LSATs published by Law Services.
- By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services.
- By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.
- By attending a test-preparation or coaching course.
- By using LSAT-preparation software.
- Self study.
- Other preparation.
- No preparation.

Combined information from the June and September 1989 test takers are presented in this report. Approximately 75 percent of the test takers responded to the test preparation questions. The respondents proportionally represent the test-taking population fairly well in terms of gender, ethnic, and geographic breakdowns, but they tend to be younger and more able than their nonresponding colleagues. Several general descriptions about LSAT test preparation emerged from these data:

- a large number of test takers fail to make use of the sample questions and explanations that are provided free of charge,
- a surprisingly small number of test takers work through a sample LSAT on their own prior to taking the test,
- approximately 45 percent of the test takers take a test-preparation or coaching course, and
- a small number of test takers report taking the LSAT without having prepared at all.

The patterns of reported test preparation are not consistent across subgroups. Females are more likely than males to participate in LSAT-specific preparation. Minorities are less likely to make use of test-preparation materials or to attend a test-preparation course, although there are some exceptions as discussed in the report. Older test takers are less likely to attend a test-preparation course and, overall, less likely to prepare at all.

A most striking observation, and one that is critical to interpretation of the data presented in this report, is that the majority of test takers use a variety of methods to prepare for the test. Test takers spread themselves so broadly across the different combinations of methods that it becomes difficult to draw even simple descriptions of those who use the various individual methods.

The importance of this report is that it provides information for the first time about how test takers prepare, as well as some description of test takers who prepare in different ways. However, it is a descriptive not a causative study. That is, it does not provide information about the effects on subsequent test performance of using different preparation methods. The most definitive conclusions evident from the descriptive data are (1) test takers who prepare in some way perform better than those who do not and (2) test takers who make use of multiple methods of preparation tend to perform better than those who use a single method.

Among the methods of preparation investigated, the largest difference in mean LSAT score is observed between those who work through one or more actual tests compared with those who do not, moderate differences are observed for those who study the questions and explanations in the *Information Book* or use a book not published by Law Services, and the smallest differences for those who attend a coaching course. These data should be particularly relevant to those who are responsible for advising potential test takers about whether to prepare for the test and who may be aided by knowing what options are used by others.

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Questions and concerns about test preparation have been raised with increasing frequency in recent years. Research addressing questions about test preparation tends to fall within two categories: research designed to provide descriptive information about the kinds and extent of preparation employed by test takers (Powers, 1981, 1988; Powers and Hecht, 1982) and research designed to establish or measure the relationship between one or more methods of test preparation and subsequent test performance (Leary and Wightman, 1983; Messick, 1980; Powers, 1982). This report describes a study that falls into the first category.

Data have not been previously available to answer even the most basic questions about the extent of test preparation among LSAT takers, or the kinds of preparation in which those test takers engage. Beginning with the June 1989 LSAT administration, test takers are asked to provide information about how they had prepared for the test. Specifically, the following question appears on the LSAT answer sheet:

How did you prepare for the LSAT? (Select all that apply)

- By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book.*
- By studying through one or more LSATs published by Law Services.
- By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services.
- By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.
- By attending a test-preparation or coaching course.
- By using LSAT-preparation software.
- Self study.
- Other preparation.
- No preparation.

Test takers are informed that responses to the question are voluntary and will be used for research purposes only. Similar questions about test preparation are currently solicited from GMAT and from GRE test takers by their respective sponsors.

This report presents a descriptive summary of the data that were obtained from the June and September 1989 test takers. More specifically, the data describe numbers of test takers who participate in different test-preparation methods, the combinations of methods that test takers use, some characteristics (such as age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region) of test takers who participate in different kinds of test-preparation activities, and the aggregate LSAT scores for groups who use different preparation methods. The report was prepared to (1) provide a snapshot of LSAT-preparation activities, and (2) help guide decisions about whether more extensive surveys or more sophisticated data analyses should be undertaken.

Table 1

States Included in Geographic Region

Region	States
Northeast	CN, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT
Southeast	DC, FL, GA, NC, SC, VA
South	AL, AR, KY, LA, MS, OK, TN, TX, WV
Midwest	IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NB, WI
West	AR, CA, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, ND, OR, SD, UT, WA, WY
Canada	All Canadian Provinces

Methods

The specific data reported here are obtained from the June and September 1989 test-taking population. All data used in this study were supplied voluntarily by the test taker and were recorded on the answer sheet on the day of the test. Test-taker background information, LSAT score, and responses to the nine LSAT preparation questions are analyzed to obtain baseline information about

1) how test takers prepare for the test,
2) whether patterns of test preparation are consistent across different subsets of test takers as defined by background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, and geographic location, and
3) whether there are differences in LSAT scores among groups of test takers who utilize different methods of preparation.

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This study is designed primarily to be descriptive and, consequently, the analyses are limited to counts, cross-tabulation, and summary statistics. The study is based on self-reported data about self-selected methods of preparing for the test. A study of this kind does not and cannot provide information on the *effects* of using different methods.

One response option is eliminated from the analyses. Publication of the LSAT *PrepWare* and *PrepKit* was delayed and these materials were not available prior to the June and September tests. However, 596 respondents report that they had used software. Because there is no way of knowing whether they had used software not published by Law Services or simply made an error in responding, these responses are eliminated from the analyses.

Two variables, age and geographic group, are calculated from related information that was supplied on the answer sheet. Age is calculated by subtracting year of birth from 1989 (year of test administration). Geographic group is determined from the center at which the test was taken. The specific states included in each group are shown in Table 1.

Results

Approximately 75 percent of the 61,898 June and September 1989 test takers responded to the test-preparation questions. Most of the results reported in this study are based on the responses from these 46,301 respondents. The response rate for LSAT takers is fairly consistent with that obtained from GMAT takers (Leary and Wightman, 1983).

Table 2 shows the percentage responding for the total group and separately by subgroup. A similar percentage of males and females responded to the questions. The rates of response are more variable among the various ethnic subgroups. Caucasian test takers responded to the questions more frequently than members of any other ethnic subgroup (77.7 percent). While the percentage from each of the different subgroups responding to the test-preparation questions varies more than the percentages from the male and female groups, no subgroup seems to be so significantly underrepresented that the data should be discounted. The lowest response rate is from Puerto Rican test takers (62.1 percent). The total number of test takers who are

Table 2

Number, Percentage, Mean LSAT Score, and Mean Age of June and September 1989 Test Takers Responding to the Test Preparation Question, by Background Characteristics

	Respondents				Nonrespondents			
Characteristic	Number	Percentage of Total	Mean LSAT	Mean Age	Number	Percentage of Total	Mean LSAT	Mean Age
Total	46301	74.8	32.76	24.69	15597	25.2	29.23	26.01
Gender:								
Male	25106	75.0	33.12	24.62	8364	25.0	29.41	25.86
Female	20480	76.0	32.29	24.74	6467	24.0	28.70	26.20
No Response	715	48.3	33.40	25.30	766	51.7	31.73	26.17
Ethnic Group:								
American Indian	164	67.2	28.17	23.67	80	32.8	25.93	26.30
Asian/Pac. Is.	1689	69.5	32.38	23.59	740	30.5	28.76	25.52
Black/Afro-American	2297	63.6	24.42	25.68	1316	36.4	20.75	28.17
Caucasian	37781	77.7	33.53	24.65	10865	22.3	30.53	25.82
Mexican American	483	73.7	28.36	25.56	172	26.3	24.04	26.72
Hispanic	977	70.9	29.17	24.39	401	29.1	24.88	25.91
Puerto Rican	292	62.1	24.64	25.03	178	37.9	19.93	26.53
Other	637	66.2	30.39	24.73	307	33.8	25.88	25.20
No Response	1981	56.6	33.14	24.60	1516	43.4	31.29	25.78
Geographic Group:								
Northeast	15877	72.6	32.97	24.15	5978	27.4	29.87	25.23
Southeast	6278	75.5	33.03	24.26	2033	24.5	29.49	25.51
South	6267	76.6	31.67	25.37	1919	23.4	27.85	27.11
Midwest	8089	78.3	33.10	24.11	2248	21.7	29.49	25.39
West	7675	75.5	32.74	26.42	2496	24.5	28.93	28.25
AK/HA/PR/VI	266	57.5	26.98	27.27	197	42.5	21.79	27.88
Canada	1827	71.9	33.14	23.33	715	28.1	29.05	24.63
Other/No Response	22	66.7	30.73	26.27	11	33.3	28.64	29.00

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members of this subgroup is small relative to the other subgroups and the response rate should have a negligible impact on the overall results. The percentage responding is very consistent across the different geographic regions, with a slightly lower percentage responding from the Northeast (73 percent) than from other areas of the U.S. mainland.

Table 2 also shows mean LSAT score and mean age for respondents and nonrespondents by subgroup. The total respondent group is about one and one-half years younger and has LSAT scores about 3.5 points higher than the nonrespondent group. Overall, the direction and magnitude of the differences between respondents and non-respondents are consistent across subgroups. There are some exceptions. American Indian respondents are about 2.5 years older than nonrespondents, and Black/Afro-American respondents are younger than nonrespondents by about 2.5 years.

Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents who used each method of preparation. This information is shown for the total group and for selected gender, ethnic, and geographic subgroups.

Less than 4 percent of the respondents report that they did not prepare at all. The most prevalent method of test preparation reported by the responding test takers is studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*, but even this method is used by less than 59 percent of the test

Table 3

Percentage of Respondents Who Used Each Method of Preparation Characteristics

Characteristic	N	Method of Preparation							
		-1-	-2-	-3-	-4-	-5-	-7	-8-	-NP-
Total	46301	38.4	34.9	12.1	49.1	45.5	37.9	5.2	3.4
Gender:									
Male	25106	56.1	33.1	11.3	47.5	42.6	38.7	5.6	4.5
Female	20480	61.3	37.2	13.1	51.3	49.4	37.0	4.7	2.0
No Response	715	53.0	36.1	9.5	41.3	36.4	36.5	6.7	8.7
Ethnic Group:									
American Indian	164	58.5	31.1	16.5	48.2	31.7	37.8	7.3	7.9
Asian/Pac. Is.	1689	57.7	39.3	12.7	49.0	47.1	40.4	4.5	3.0
Black/Afro-American	2297	55.1	27.1	16.1	44.6	40.7	40.4	6.3	3.0
Caucasian	37781	59.3	35.5	11.8	50.2	45.8	37.7	5.0	3.2
Mexican American	483	50.5	26.5	11.6	47.0	45.3	38.7	6.2	3.3
Hispanic	977	47.5	28.0	10.5	38.0	54.5	35.6	5.1	4.2
Puerto Rican	292	47.3	24.7	12.7	37.7	41.8	31.8	6.2	9.6
Other	601	57.1	37.1	12.0	40.6	45.9	10.4	8.5	4.8
No Response	1981	54.1	36.7	12.2	43.0	41.9	37.8	6.9	6.1
Geographic Group:									
Northeast	15877	56.0	36.7	11.8	45.4	50.1	38.3	5.1	3.0
Southeast	6278	55.3	33.8	10.9	48.1	47.3	38.3	5.1	3.7
South	6267	59.1	29.0	12.2	52.6	39.6	37.1	5.5	3.5
Midwest	8089	59.0	32.6	11.4	52.5	40.9	37.6	5.4	3.6
West	7675	60.2	37.9	13.0	49.7	48.2	38.9	5.3	3.9
AK/HA/PR/VI	266	66.2	32.7	13.5	50.0	19.2	36.5	6.0	10.9
Canada	1827	74.9	42.4	16.8	55.0	32.5	32.5	4.7	1.5

Key:
1. By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*.
2. By studying through one or more LSAT's published by Law Services.
3. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services.
4. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.
5. By attending a test preparation or coaching course.
* 6. By using LSAT preparation software.
7. Self-study.
8. Other preparation.

NP. No preparation.

Note. * Responses to this option were not analyzed in this study.

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takers. The next most popular methods of preparing are using a book on how to prepare not published by Law Services (49.1 percent) and attending a test-preparation or coaching course (45.5 percent). A surprisingly small number of test takers report that they actually worked through one or more LSATs in preparation for taking the test (34.9 percent). Approximately 12 percent of the respondents report that they used a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services. The original intention of this question was to collect information about test takers who used the *PrepKit* materials. Because we know that they did not use the *PrepKit* materials, these test takers must have used *The Official LSAT Sample Test Book*. The test takers who use *The Official LSAT Sample Test Book* are likely to be the same test takers who prepared by working through an actual LSAT. The data show a small positive correlation between responses to the methods "by studying through one or more LSATs published by Law Services" and "by using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services" (r=.18). The survey questions appearing on the 1990-91 answer sheets have been clarified by including exact publication titles in some questions.

Table 3 also shows the percentage of respondents who used each method within subgroup categories. Female test takers report more participation in test-preparation courses and more use of LSAT-specific preparation materials than do their male counterparts. The use of the various preparation methods varies considerably among the different ethnic subgroups. The American Indian, Asian American, and Caucasian test takers report the highest use of the materials provided in the *Law Services Information Book* and Puerto Rican and Hispanic test takers report the lowest. Attending a test-preparation or coaching course varies from a high of 54.5 percent reported by Hispanic test takers to a low of 31.7 percent reported by American Indian test takers. Attending a coaching course also varies by geographic region, with the highest incidence occurring in the Northeast. Canadian test takers and test takers from Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands attended test-preparation courses least often.

Table 4 provides data to allow some comparison of test takers who elected to use each of the methods of preparation with those who did not. Overall, mean LSAT scores for test takers who used each method do not differ greatly from those of test takers who did not. Test takers who studied the sample questions in the *Law Services Information*

Table 4

Comparison of Respondents Who Used Various Methods of Preparation With Those Who Did Not

	Number N / %		LSAT Mean / SD		Age Mean / SD	
Preparation Method	Used	Did Not Use	Used	Did Not Use	Used	Did Not Use
By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*	27022 58.4%	19279 41.6%	33.39 7.83	31.87 7.94	25.12 6.73	24.08 5.99
By studying through one or more LSAT's published by Law Services	16181 34.9%	30120 65.1%	34.56 7.57	31.79 7.92	24.50 6.39	24.78 6.49
By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services	5591 12.1%	40710 87.9%	31.14 8.18	32.98 7.85	25.34 7.00	24.60 6.37
By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services	22726 49.1%	23575 50.9%	33.59 7.52	31.96 8.19	24.79 6.38	24.58 6.52
By attending a test preparation or coaching course	21062 45.5%	25239 54.5%	32.88 7.66	32.66 8.11	23.74 5.91	25.47 6.77
Self-study	17545 37.9%	28756 62.1%	32.60 7.79	32.86 7.98	24.54 6.35	24.77 6.52
Other preparation	2415 5.2%	43886 94.8%	31.55 8.13	32.82 7.89	24.58 6.34	24.69 6.46
No Preparation	44719 96.6%	1582 3.4%	31.22 8.28	32.81 7.89	26.35 7.57	24.63 6.40

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Book earn slightly higher scores on the LSAT and are slightly older than those who did not. The largest difference in LSAT means is observed between those who actually worked through one or more LSATs and those who did not. Those who reported that they attended a coaching course tend to be younger than those who did not, with an average age difference of more than one and one-half years, and to have LSAT scores averaging two-tenths of a point higher than those who did not attend a course. Test takers who reported self-study or other methods of preparation do not differ in age from those who did not, but their LSAT scores tend to be lower. Test takers who reported no preparation are older and earn lower LSAT scores than those who prepared.

Summing across the percentages using each method of preparation quickly reveals that many test takers are using two or more methods to prepare for the test. Table 5 presents information about the different combinations of preparation that the respondents used. Less than one-third of the respondents report that they used only one method of preparation. Among those who used a single method, the most popular is attending a test-preparation or coaching course. Approximately 23.5 percent of the respondents report using two methods and nearly as many report using three. The remainder used four or more methods, with 177 respondents reporting that they had used each of the options.

Among the seven methods of preparing for the LSAT included in this study, there are 128 possible response patterns. Only those combinations that were reported by 200 or more test takers are included in Table 5. Studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book* is included in more than two-thirds of the frequently reported combinations consisting of three or more methods and in half of the pairs for test takers using two methods. Attending a coaching course also appears in 40 percent of those pairs.

Table 5 also provides mean LSAT scores for test takers reporting various combinations of methods of preparation. The means tend to increase as the variety of preparation methods increases, with some drop-off in mean among those who used six methods and a substantial decrease among those who reported using all seven. Among the specific combinations, the highest mean LSAT scores are recorded for those who prepared by using the combination of studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*, working through one or more LSATs, and using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.

As an aid to understanding the patterns of test-preparation methods used by LSAT takers, a partial listing of test-preparation-method combinations, in descending order by number of test takers reporting the combination, is presented in Table 6. The table provides counts and percentage of participation for all method-combinations that were reported by 2.0 percent or more of the June and September 1989 respondents. A listing using the 2.0 percent criterion only accounts for about 60 percent of the total respondents, confirming that test takers prepare using a variety of methods and that it would be very difficult to isolate information to allow evaluation of the effectiveness of individual methods. For example, as noted in Table 6, the single most frequently used test-preparation "combination" is attending a test-preparation or coaching course with no additional type of preparation. Approximately 12 percent of the respondents report having prepared exclusively by attending a course. When this number is compared to the total percentage of respondents who report attending a test-preparation course (45.3 percent), it becomes clear that more than 73 percent of those test takers who report attending a coaching course also participated in one or more additional methods of preparation. These data help to illustrate the difficulty encountered when trying to isolate data to study relationships between a single method of test preparation and subsequent test performance. The data in Table 6 also reveal that attending a coaching course is not included among the next six most frequently used methods or combinations, the sum of which accounts for 29.1 percent of the total respondents.

Summary and Conclusions

The data collected in June and September 1989 allow for the first systematic description of the ways in which test takers prepare for the LSAT. The respondents to the test-preparation questions proportionally represent the total test taking population fairly well in terms of gender, ethnic, and geographic breakdowns, although some ethnic subgroups are somewhat underrepresented. The respondents tend to be younger and more able, as measured by LSAT score, than their nonresponding colleagues. Several general descriptions about how LSAT takers prepare for the test emerged from these data:

1) Although sample questions and explanations are provided to every test taker at no charge, a substantial number fail to make use of this information.

2) Despite the evidence supporting the value of working through an actual test form under simulated testing conditions, including strict

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Table 5

Number, Percentage, and Mean LSAT Scores of Respondents Using Different Numbers of Test Preparation Methods

Number of Methods	N	Percent	Mean LSAT
Seven Methods:	177	0.38%	31.17
Six Methods:	859	1.86%	33.13
1-2-3-4-5-7	563		33.29
Five Methods:	2886	6.23%	33.62
1-2-4-5-7	1199		35.08
1-2-3-4-7	489		33.66
1-2-3-4-5	380		33.22
Four Methods:	6386	13.79%	33.84
1-2-4-7	1532		35.57
1-2-4-5	1033		35.71
1-4-5-7	804		32.23
1-2-3-4	304		34.50
1-4-7-8	237		31.97
2-4-5-7	224		34.27
1-2-3-5	210		31.64
Three Methods:	10713	23.14%	33.54
1-4-7	2503		32.86
1-2-4	1511		36.38
1-2-5	1458		35.76
1-4-5	803		33.13
1-5-7	753		31.90
1-2-7	503		33.98
4-5-7	501		31.71
2-4-5	344		34.88
2-4-7	306		34.46
Two Methods:	10878	23.49%	32.92
1-4	3223		34.06
1-5	1299		30.80
5-7	986		31.60
1-2	962		34.83
4-7	849		31.88
2-5	781		35.20
1-7	676		30.04
4-5	624		32.32
2-4	377		35.41
1-3	236		29.19
Single Method:	14394	31.09%	31.39
5	5681		31.65
4	2459		32.33
1	2263		30.91
NP	1582		31.23
7	1180		30.18
2	539		33.07
3	370		27.89
8	255		29.40
Total	46301	100.00%	32.76

Key:
1. By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book.*
2. By studying through one or more LSATs published by Law Services.
3. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services.
4. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.
5. By attending a test-preparation or coaching course.
* 6. By using LSAT preparation software.
7. Self-study.
8. Other preparation.

NP. No preparation.

Note. * **Responses to this option were not analyzed in this study.**

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timing conditions, a surprisingly small number of test takers avail themselves of this method of preparation.

3) Almost half of the test takers purchase and use materials from sources external to Law Services.

4) Approximately 45 percent of the respondents have increased the cost of applying to Law School by attending a test-preparation or coaching course. This may be a minimum estimate. That is, at least some proportion of the test takers may have attended such courses and not reported it, but it is unlikely that any who claim to have attended a course did not do so. The question did not differentiate between commercial coaching courses and the test-preparation courses offered for free or at nominal cost by academic institutions or prelaw advisors. Future test-preparation questions make this distinction, and the more refined data should be considered in follow-up studies.

5) A small number of test takers report taking the LSAT without having prepared at all. This number is likely a minimum estimate because responses reported here are voluntary. That is, test takers who did not prepare may prefer not to reveal that information and, therefore, might not respond. The overall lower performance on the LSAT by those who report no preparation tends to support the accuracy of their response.

Table 6

A Partial Listing of Test-Preparation Combinations

Response Pattern	Number	Percent
5	5681	12.27%
1-4	3223	6.96%
1-4-7	2503	5.41%
4	2459	5.31%
1	2263	4.89%
1-2-4-7	1532	3.31%
1-2-4	1511	3.26%
1-2-5	1458	3.15%
1-5	1299	2.81%
1-2-3-5-7	1199	2.59%
7	1180	2.55%
1-2-4-5	1033	2.23%
5-7	986	2.13%
1-2	962	2.08%

Key:
1. By studying the sample questions in the *Law Services Information Book*.
2. By studying through one or more LSAT's published by Law Services.
3. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT published by Law Services.
4. By using a book on how to prepare for the LSAT not published by Law Services.
5. By attending a test preparation or coaching course.
* 6. By using LSAT preparation software.
7. Self-study.
8. Other preparation.

NP. No preparation.

Notes. * Responses to this option were not included in this study. All other combinations account for less than 2.0% of the June and September 1989 respondents.

Several characteristics of the responses by subgroup provide further description about the patterns of LSAT preparation:

1) Females are more likely than their male peers to have participated in LSAT-specific preparation.

2) Overall, minority test takers are less likely to make use of test-preparation materials and to attend test-preparation or coaching courses. This pattern does not hold for Asian American test takers. Additionally, Hispanic test takers report the highest proportion attending test-preparation or coaching courses.

3) Test takers who elect not to prepare are older than those who use methods of test preparation. Age differences are also striking between those who do and do not attend test-preparation courses. This difference may be related to the lack of accessibility to courses for those who are no longer attending school.

Critical to the interpretation of these data is recognition of the fact that the majority of test takers use several methods to prepare for the test. Test takers spread themselves so broadly across the various combinations of methods that it becomes difficult even to draw simple descriptions of those who use the various individual methods.

Admission officers and prelaw advisors are frequently asked to advise prospective test takers about how best to prepare for the LSAT. This report provides information about how test takers prepare and provides some description of test takers who prepare in different ways or in different combinations of ways. It does not and cannot provide information about the effects of using different methods of preparation. This limitation is a consequence of several factors. First, test takers self-select to use particular methods or combina-

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tions. Individual characteristics of motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, socioeconomic status, academic ability, and preparedness are among the factors that influence the methods of self-selection. For example, test takers who choose to undertake self-study of content-related materials earn lower LSAT scores than those who do not. It is somewhat counterintuitive to think that participating in self-study causes them to perform more poorly than if they do not. In fact, it is quite plausible that those test takers who are least academically prepared in areas of critical thinking or logical reasoning would be the most likely to participate in external or self-study. Their lower scores may simply reflect their overall lower ability or less adequate academic backgrounds. Accompanying the concept of self-selection is the problem of lack of a control group. In other words, we have no way of knowing how well test takers who used any method of preparation would have done on the test if they had not used it. Likewise, we have no way of knowing whether test takers who choose not to use a particular method could improve their performance if they did so. Finally, as noted previously, the majority of test takers use more than one method to prepare. It is impossible to isolate the effects of the individual methods or to know whether the use of some methods in combination might be more effective than using any one in isolation.

With these caveats in mind, there are some observations about the LSAT performance of respondents who elected to use different preparation methods that may be helpful to prospective test takers:

1) Test takers who prepare in some way for the test perform better than those who do not.

2) Test takers who make use of multiple methods of preparation tend to perform better than those who use a single method.

The largest difference in mean LSAT scores is observed for those who work through one or more actual tests compared with those who do not (2.77 score-points), a moderate difference is observed for those who study the questions and explanations in the *Information Book* or use a book not published by Law Services (1.52 and 1.63 score-points, respectively), and the smallest difference is observed for those who attend a coaching course (0.22 score points). This information is particularly relevant because such a large proportion of LSAT takers, especially minority test takers, do not take advantage of the preparation materials that are available at little or no cost through the *Information Book* and disclosed forms of the test. At a minimum, test takers should be encouraged to become familiar with the test using the materials provided through these sources.

These data do not provide a simple answer to the question, "Should I take a test-preparation course?" They do provide some important information to those who are trying to make an informed decision about whether to prepare for the test and who may be aided by knowing what options are used by other test takers.

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